



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## One thousand volunteers expected at Iowa State Parks' Volunteer Day, Sept. 22

Iowans can help make their park a better place on Sept. 22 as more than 40 state parks will participate in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) second annual statewide Volunteer Day.

Todd Coffelt, chief of the Iowa DNR's State Parks Bureau, said he hopes to see 1,000 Iowans participate in the event.

"Iowa state parks are important places many people enjoy for the natural beauty and outdoor fun they provide," said Coffelt. "We know a lot of people want to help care for them, and this is a great opportunity to lend a hand."

Activities will be unique for each park depending on clean-up needs, but may include litter pick-up, staining or painting buildings, planting trees, clearing trails and more. Details can be found at [www.iowadnr.gov/volunteer](http://www.iowadnr.gov/volunteer).

Clean-up efforts are partly in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the Iowa state park system, which takes place in 2020. The DNR is working with several organizations to create park improvements and plan activities for the centennial event.

Volunteers for the Sept. 22 clean-up day are encouraged to share their activities on social media with #iowastateparks.

**Media Contact:** Todd Coffelt, Chief, State Parks Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-725-8485

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## 2018 Iowa mussel blitz on the Iowa River

The Iowa River, from the Coralville Dam to Hills, was the focus of this year's annual research project to inventory and map the distribution of Iowa's mussels, often called clams.

More than 50 biologists, students, county naturalists and volunteers collected 22 species of freshwater mussels in the Iowa River during the three day event held each August since 2005.

Live mussels were inventoried, measured for growth; and then returned to the water. Most were found using a technique known as pollywogging, as researchers and volunteers crawl along a stream bed, probing the bottom with gloved hands. Trained divers inventoried deep water spots.

"These studies help us learn more about mussels and the areas where they live and thrive," said Scott Gritters, fisheries biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "The Iowa River by Coralville is one of our most studied resources. We have been tracking mussels here every few years since 2005 to watch the population trends, including after the historic floods of 2008 and one extreme low water period."

The Iowa River mussel population does not appear to be as abundant as it was 10 years ago, but this year's Mussel Blitz documented pockets of rich and diverse mussel beds. Many areas of the Iowa River have few mussels, but short stretches are still very rich and diverse, Gritters said.

"The majority of the mussels were found in coarse gravel with one to three-inch rock with very little sand," said Paul Sleeper, fellow fisheries biologist with the Iowa DNR responsible for managing this section of the Iowa River. "These stretches, easily searched in two to three feet of water, are perfect fish spawning habitat for shovelnose sturgeon and smallmouth bass."

Together, the Iowa DNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started researching the disappearance of native fresh-water mussels in Iowa 13 years ago. This includes searching for the federally endangered Higgins-eye pearly mussel. Once ranging across most of the Upper Midwest, this species has been eliminated from many of the rivers in which it once thrived.

"About 54 species of native mussels were once found in Iowa. Now, there's about 42. Nine of these are endangered. Another six are threatened and several more species are very hard to find any more in Iowa," said Gritters.

Stretches of the Cedar, Wapsipinicon and Iowa rivers have been stocked in the past several years with walleyes and bass whose gills had been injected with the mussels' larvae.

"Stocking fish, something we commonly do anyway, is one way to reintroduce mussels into our rivers," said Gritters.

Mussels are a good indicator of the health of a river. The better the water quality, the more mussels there are in that water. Mussels compact the algae they filter then kick out the crushed pellet to waiting fish; much like how fish are fed at a fish hatchery. Native mussels generally do not do well in soft substrates or fine sand. Impoundments which block migrating fish, also are a major hindrance to native mussels which are transported by hitchhiking on the fish.

"The whole river ecosystem runs better with native mussels living in it. Fish and mussels depend on each other," said Gritters. "Our fish populations and the opportunities people have to enjoy clean water improve when mussels are presents."

**Media Contact:** Scott Gritters, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 563-872-4976.

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## Badger Lake offers an easy nature stop off I-29



*A bumblebee busily works over the flowers on Canada goldenrod at Badger Lake. The 1,100-acre public wildlife area along I-29 in northern Monona County is converting former crop fields to prairie to the benefit of grassland birds including pheasants and quail. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

Whiting, Iowa - Sitting not quite halfway between Sioux City and Council Bluffs with I-29 going right through it, it's easy to think that Badger Lake Wildlife Area would be overrun with bird watchers, duck hunters, kayakers and nature lovers 24/7/365. While it does get busy when the duck migration is on, many days the only visitor is a wayward cormorant or a neighbor stopping by to wet a line.

This quiet but highly visible area is home to one of the lesser known historic campsites of Lewis and Clark's Expedition and work is underway to transform much of the area back to grasslands like those the famous explorers encountered while searching for a direct water route to the Pacific Ocean.

Doug Chafa, wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, is responsible for managing the 1,100 acres of timber, upland, prairie and wetlands that

makes up Badger Lake. He has been working to re-establish diverse prairies where fields of brome grass had grown stale and where trees spread their influence over the grasslands.

Chafa has converted three locations with a prairie plant mix to benefit monarchs and regal fritillaries butterflies, grassland birds and pheasants and quail. The conversion takes time and can be deceiving, even to the trained eye, but after doing it for 20 years, Chafa knows what to expect.

“The first year, the plants put all their energy in root development so the fields look like a weedy mess. The second year the plants begin to focus upward and after we burn it in year three, the prairie just explodes,” he said.

Walking through the first year prairie after the late summer mowing, the familiar pattern is evident. A little purple prairie clover is over here. A little golden rod is over there. This field is next to a plum patch that will provide excellent winter escape to the prairie wildlife.

While much of the focus has been on prairies, part of the management plan includes maintaining 18 small food plots rotating from corn to soybeans and then idle to allow it to come up in annual weeds. The annual weeds attract bugs, produce a lot of seeds and provide cover for chicks. Only four of the fields will be idled at one time.

### **Duck hunting hotspot**

Badger Lake is a linear series of wetlands connected by culverts under roads that provides opportunities for kayaking and fishing, but is best known for high quality duck hunting.

Hunters come from Plymouth, Crawford, Pottawattamie, Monona and Woodbury counties, and from Nebraska. Chafa regularly gets calls from a Shelby County hunter when duck season is open.

“He does everything he can to get his son out and his first call is over here for what’s going on at either Badger Lake or Tieville Bend,” he said.

Want an inside tip? If it’s a migration day and the wind is strong enough out of the northwest, ducks will pile in to the marsh east of I-29 in the portion of the slough that turns from south to the west regardless of the number of hunters that are there.

There is a 200-acre refuge on the north end west of I-29. Badger Lake is in a closed goose zone, meaning goose hunting is not allowed.

There are three boat ramps on different segments to allow larger boats to access the wetlands. In response to hunter request, the boat ramp areas were deepened and gravel added to improve access.

### **Birding Loop**



Badger Lake, along with Blue Lake and Tieville Bend, is part of popular birding loop. The area hosts forest species, wetland species, grassland species, and has a tremendous spring snow goose migration

Purple gallinules, a secretive marsh bird, have been seen here. A few years ago a pair of young osprey started to build a nest structure but did not nest. The pair hasn't been seen since. Bald eagles nested on the north shore in 2016 and 2017 but a wind storm knocked out the nest in 2017 and the eagles have not returned.

### **Know where you are**

Visitors need to be aware of their location to avoid trespassing on private land. The public land follows the lake closely and is along part of I-29.

### **Etcetera**

Crappie fishing here can be boom or bust, Chafa said. This past spring, it was boom.

Badger Lake attracts photographers in the fall, and dog walkers and exercisers use the field lanes. "It's pretty cool to get people out here experiencing nature," he said.

**Media Contact:** Doug Chafa, Wildlife Management Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-420-2437.

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## **Iowa DNR to host hunting incident academy**

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is partnering with the International Hunter Education Association to host the USA Hunting Incident Investigation Academy at Honey Creek State Park Resort and the DNR Rathbun Fish Hatchery September 16-20.

The media is encouraged to attend the scenario sessions as investigators will be trained to properly collect and document the facts of hunting related incidents ensuring proper methodology and techniques are utilized.

Investigators will be participating in hands-on interactive investigation scenarios to learn the latest techniques in conducting investigations. The academy will also include courses on blood spatter, ballistics, scene photography, scene documentation, scene management and evidence collection among others.

**(\*\*\*Media availability - Please coordinate with Megan Wisecup beforehand\*\*\*):**

- Monday, Sept. 18: 10:15 am – 12 pm, 3 – 4:50 pm – Rathbun Fish Hatchery

- Tuesday, Sept. 19: 12:30 – 2:45 pm – Rathbun Fish Hatchery
- Wednesday, Sept. 20: 9:15 am – 3 pm – Rathbun Fish Hatchery

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